

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 SAJ-01 CIAE-00
DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 /055 W
-----141555Z 042539 /53

R 141055Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2229
INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 0082

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: BU, PFOR
SUBJECT: BULGARIAN PRESS COVERAGE OF TRANSITION: A SLIGHT
CHANGE OF TONE

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY HAS NOTICED TWO CHARACTERISTICS
IN BULGARIAN PRESS COVERAGE OF APPOINTMENTS AND
POLICY STATEMENTS OF NEW ADMINISTRATION THAT
DISTINGUISH IT IN SOME DEGREE FROM NORMAL BULGARIAN
COVERAGE OF US AFFAIRS. FIRST IS THE AMOUNT OF
COVERAGE, WHICH IS GREATER THAN USUAL. SECOND, WHILE
RETAINING UNDERTONE OF CRITICISM, COVERAGE HAS BEEN
BOTH MORE FACTUAL AND MORE RESTRAINED THAN USUAL.

2. BULGARIAN PRESS HAS BEEN PRINTING WHAT FOR IT IS
VERY LARGE AMOUNT OF MATERIAL ON THE APPOINTMENTS AND
POLICY STATEMENTS OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION. LONG
ARTICLES BY ITS WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT, VLADIMIR
LANKOV, HAVE APPEARED ALMOST DAILY IN BCP CENTRAL
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COMMITTEE PAPER, RABOTNICHESKO DELO. SOME OF THE
SLIGHTLY LESS OFFICIAL AND SOMETIMES MORE RABIDLY ANTI-US
PAPERS, SUCH AS THE KOMSOMOL PAPER NARODNA MLADZHZH AND
THE LABOR PAPER TRUD, HAVE ALSO DEVOTED MUCH MORE
ATTENTION TO US THAN HAS BEEN USUAL IN PAST. IN ADDITION,
THIS INCREASED COVERAGE HAS BEEN BASICALLY FACTUAL,
PROVIDING A LARGE AMOUNT OF STRAIGHT INFORMATION ON THE

NEW PEOPLE AND THEIR STATEMENTS OF POLICY. AND EVEN COMMENT ON THESE POLICY POSITIONS HAS BEEN NOTABLY LESS TENDENTIOUS THAN BEFORE.

3. NOT THAT BULGARIAN CLAWS HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY SHEATHED, OF COURSE. COMMENT ON US ECONOMIC POLICIES STILL IMPLIES THAT THESE ARE PART OF THE DEATH THROES OF WESTERN CAPITALISM, AND US POLITICAL LEADERS ARE STILL ASSESSED IN TERMS OF THE DEGREE OF THEIR ADVOCACY OF PRESUMED "ANTI-SOVIET" POSITIONS. BUT EVEN HERE, MORE NUANCED VERSIONS HAVE REPLACED SOME OF THE FORMER BLACK/WHITE TREATMENT.

4. READING THE BULGARIAN PRESS BESIDE MOSCOW'S PRESS SUMMARIES, IT IS OUR IMPRESSION THAT TONE OF BULGARIAN PRESS COMMENTARY MAY BE SLIGHTLY WARMER THOUGH STILL ROUGHLY PARALLEL TO SOVIET PRESS TREATMENT OF NEW ADMINISTRATION. THIS IN ITSELF REPRESENTS SOME CHANGE SINCE BULGARIAN PRESS IN THE PAST HAS SEEMED TO US GENERALLY MORE UNRELENTING IN ITS JOURNALISTIC ASSAULTS ON US, AS THOUGH TRYING TO PROVE ITSELF MORE PIOUS THAN THE POPE.

5. WE CAN SEE SEVERAL POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THE CHANGE, WHICH MAY WELL PROVE TEMPORARY. BULGARIA WOULD LIKE TO GET OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT WITH THE NEW ADMINISTRATION, BOTH IN THE GENERAL SENSE AND IN TERMS OF MORE PARTICULAR ASPIRATIONS TOWARD MFN, BROADENED TRADE, INCREASED ACCESS TO US TECHNOLOGY, ETC. SECONDLY, THERE HAVE

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BEEN SOME INDICATIONS THAT, PREPARATORY TO BELGRADE '77, GOB IS CREATING A RECORD OF EXTENSIVE COVERAGE OF US AFFAIRS TO CONTRAST WITH SKIMPY US COVERAGE OF MATTERS BULGARIAN, NOTWITHSTANDING THE OBVIOUS REBUTTAL OF NONCOMPARABILITY.

6. WHATEVER THE MOTIVATION, IT IS ENCOURAGING TO PROSPECTS FOR MORE NORMAL US/BULGARIAN RELATIONS THAT BULGARIAN PUBLIC HAS BEEN FED A LESS PERNICIOUS DIET OF US NEWS SINCE ABOUT LATE NOVEMBER. IT WILL NOW BE INTERESTING TO SEE WHETHER SOME OF THIS SOMEWHAT MODIFIED TONE RUBS OFF ON PENDING ISSUES AFFECTING OUR RELATIONS SUCH AS FAMILY REUNIFICATION, ACCESS TO OFFICIALS, BONDHOLDERS' CLAIMS, ETC. FOR THE RECORD, WE HAVE NOTICED IN THE LAST SEVERAL WEEKS A GREATER WILLINGNESS OF BULGARIAN OFFICIALS TO ACCEPT SOCIAL INVITATIONS. HERZ

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, INTERIM GOVERNMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 14-Jan-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977SOFIA00082
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770014-1154
Format: TEL
From: SOFIA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770150/aaaabrwj.tel
Line Count: 114
Litigation Code IDs:
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Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: bb3971d9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02-Dec-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3595382
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BULGARIAN PRESS COVERAGE OF TRANSITION: A SLIGHT CHANGE OF TONE
TAGS: PFOR, BU, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/bb3971d9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009